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OFSO/WAINIO
COMMERCE FOR 4431/ITA/MAC/AP/OPB/TAIWAN

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SUBJECT: TAIPEI REPLY ON INFORMATION REQUEST TO SUPPORT APEC FOOD
SECURITY INITIATIVES

Reference: State 9650

11. (SBU) Summary: Taiwan has few domestic food-security concerns, but relies on imported food for 65 percent of its people's diet. Taiwan's main food-security concern is that, without access to most international organizations that address food security, Taiwan can neither access the latest information on food-related issues, nor provide domestic ideas, technology, and funding for reducing food insecurity in the APEC region. End summary.

12. (SBU) On September 25, econoff met with Liang-yu Wang, Chief of the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Department of International Organizations APEC Task Force, and Tracy Tarng, Chief of the Council of Agriculture (COA) International Organizations Section, International Affairs Department.

13. (SBU) According to Tarng and Wang, Taiwan has few domestic food-security concerns. Although Taiwan is a mountainous, densely populated island, and is therefore only able to supply domestically about 35 percent of the calories its people consume, Taiwan makes up the rest through imports, mostly from the United States. [Note: Taiwan relies on the U.S. for virtually all of its wheat, corn, and soybean imports. End note.] Taiwan holds a three-month security reserve of 300,000 tons of rice. Tarng and Wang think a blockade of Taiwan by a hostile power is unlikely, and are therefore not overly concerned about the island's reliance on imported food.

14. (SBU) According to Ms. Wang, Taiwan's main regional food-security concern is that the island is not a member of, and has no access to, key international organizations that address food security. Ms. Tarng pointed out that in 2007, due to rising oil prices, grains such as soybeans and corn were diverted to produce energy, causing international price fluctuations that deeply affected Taiwan. Tarng added that, as a food-importing island and a technologically-advanced economy, Taiwan could both benefit from information exchange and dialogue with international organizations, and contribute ideas, technology, and funding for reducing food insecurity in the APEC region.

15. (SBU) Tarng told econoff that Taiwan has been very active in food-aid programs since the 1960s, but over the past decade, in line with recommendations from the United Nations and other international aid organizations, has shifted to providing financial aid in lieu of direct food aid. Taiwan also organizes agricultural technical missions to assist countries, especially its remaining diplomatic allies, in improving farm yields, irrigations systems, and basic agricultural infrastructure.

